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ABSTRACT

Cooperative education (Co-Op) programs have been used at the college level in order to facilitate the transition from school to work. Studies have shown that such programs increase student motivation, better integrate theory and practice, aid development of maturity, foster greater human relations skills, and orient students to the world of work. It was also found that cooperative education can play an important role in career education, particularly in the areas of career selection and preparation, career plans, and careeer advancement. In addition, it appeared that Co-Op had differential outcomes for women and minorities. As a result of a multi-phased analysis, it was concluded that cooperative education college women developed provisional career commitment between the ages of 18 and 25. Seventy-three percent of the women in the program demonstrated some form of career commitment. Further, it was found that Co-Op women who demonstrated commitment could be distinguished from Co-Op women who did not on the basis of nine variables. Those variables were age, type of school (two- or four-year), type of major, grade point average, level of educational attainment, specific job characteristics (self-control, responsibility, and challenge), importance of education, importance of work during college, and career goals. As a result of this study, it was possible to identify variables that contribute to the career commitment of women during the college years. The study has implications for the role of counselors in guiding young women into college Co-Op programs. (KC)

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAREER COMMITMENT IN COLLEGE WOMEN

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Introduction

Super (1953) theorized that between the ages of 18 and 25 a person developed provisional commitment to a career field and planned to improve his/her position within that field. Super referred to this as the establishment stage of career development. This observation led Crites (1976) to speculate that there was a preceding stage which involved the transition from school to work. According to Crites, this marked the beginning of the establishment stage.

In order to facilitate mastery of tasks appropriate to the transition from school to work, more guided exploration and increased realty testing have been recommonded (Jordaan, 1974; Hoppock, 1976). In addition, Coleman, Bremner, Clark, Davis, Eichorn, Griliches, Kett, Ryder, Doering and Mays (1974) argued that while the educational process should contribute to the transition from school to work, this could not be done satisfactorily within the microcosmic setting of the school. Therefore, an educational approach which placed youth in real work settings was advocated. Cooperative Education (Co-Op) postsecondary level, was identified as such an education approach (Coleman et al, 1974; O'Toole, 1973).

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The concept of Co-Op evolved as a result of Deal Herman Schneider's "pedagogical research" at the University of Cincinnati at the turn of the century. It was not until 1950 that Henry H. Armsby developed a concise definition of Cooperative Education. Armsby's definition was accepted by the Cooperative Education Division of the American Society of Engineering Education.

> Cooperative Education is defined as the integration of classroom work and practical industrial experience in (an organized program) under which students alternate periods of attendance at college with periods of employment in industry, business, or government. The employment constitutes a regular (continuing) and essential element in the educational process, and some minimum amount of employment and minimum standard of performance are included in the requirements for a degree. The plan requires that the student's employment be related to some phase of the branch or field of study in which he is engaged, and that it be diversified in order to afford a spread of experience. It requires further that this industrial work shall increase in difficulty and responsibility as he progresses through his college curriculum, and in general shall parallel as closely as possible his progress through the academic phases of his education. (In Heyborne, 1978, p. 335)

According to Borman (1977), three basic principles have emerged as being essential to Cooperative Education:

1. Alternation of academic periods and work periods on regular basis;
2. Close supervision of the student in both the academic and the work periods;
3. Careful integration of the academic and the work experience and a commitment on the part of both industry and education to provide a superior education for the student.

Borman went on to describe Schneider's system as a "laboratory session during which the student would be working in the real world" (p. 10). In addition to facilitating acquisition of specific skills and earning of tuition money, Ell (1935) observed that Co-Op came immediately to grips with the problems of personal development and social adjustment (p. 449).

Related Studies

The first National Assessment of Cooperative Education (Wilson et al 1961) has served as the principal documentation of the value of Co-Op to college students. Wilson et al (1961) concluded that:

1. Theory and practice are more closely integrated;
2. The coordination of work and study increased student motivation;
3. Students experienced a greater sense of responsibility, dependence on their own judgment and development of maturity;
4. Students developed greater human relations skills;
5. Students were oriented to the world of work.

In subsequent studies, Brown (1976, 1978) studied the influences of Co-Op on graduates of Co-Op programs and regular college programs. Brown was concerned with respondents' views of their undergraduate career preparation, their first permanent job, and their current employment situation. Particular attention was paid to sex, race, graduate data,

and major. Brown (1976, 1978) reported outcome differences for women and minorities, as did Kany (1973). Brown's (1976) study also replicated earlier findings of Mosbacher (1957).

One of the four areas of inquiry during the second National Assessment of Cooperative Education (1976) was the assessment of the role of Co-Op as a Career Education mechanism. As a result of the analyses, it was concluded that Co-Op can play an important role in Career Education particularly in the areas of (1) career selection and preparation, (2) career plans, and (3) career advancement.

No studies were found which accounted for the influences of Co-Op on the career development process of college students. None the less, there were tentative indications that participation in Co-Op related to career selection and preparedness, career plans, and career advancement (Frankel et al, 1978). In addition, it appeared that Co-Op had differential outcomes for women and minorities (Brown, 1976, 1978; Kany, 1973). However, most studies have been limited as a result of their methodological approaches.

Garner (1980) conducted a secondary analysis of the data generated on female students in the second National Assessment of Cooperative Education. One of the main purposes of the study was to determine the influences of Co-Op on the career development of college women. As a result of a multi-phased analysis, it was concluded that Co-Op college women developed provisional career commitment between the ages of 18 and 25.

Seventy-three percent of the Co-Op women in the study demonstrated some form of career commitment. Further, it was found that Co-Op women who demonstrated commitment could be distinguished from Co-Op women who did not on the basis of nine variables. Those variables were age, type of school (two year versus four year), type of major (traditional versus nontraditional), grade point average, level of educational attainment, specific job characteristics (self-control, responsibility, and challenge), importance of education, importance of work during college, and career goals.

As a result of this study, it was possible to identify variables which contribute to the career commitment of women during the college years. More research needs to be conducted to determine how and to what extent these variables impact on the career development process of college women.

A secondary finding of the Garner study (1980) was that women who participated in Cooperative Education during college differed from women who did not on the basis of age, type of school, and type of major. In other words, a woman's selection of a college and a major were critical factors in whether or not she participated in a Cooperative Education Program.

Implications for Counselors

Recent studies point to the importance of programs such as Cooperative Education in the vocational development of young adults. Consequently, counselors need to become familiar with the concept of Cooperative Education at the postsecondary level.

Such information can be used to help college-bound females make informed decisions with regard to colleges, majors, and work experience during college. In addition, college counselors need to become aware of the work experience programs available on their campuses in order to help college women continue to make progress in their career development during their college years.

This report is based on dissertation research done at Virginia Tech under the direction of Drs. Carl McDaniels, Chairman; Dean Hummel; Larry Weber; Wayne Warner; John White, Department of Statistics and Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, Georgia; Katherine Cole, Bowie State.

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